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SUBJECT: RHYTHM ROAD 2009: AMERICAN JAZZ FINDS EAGER AUDIENCE IN
KUWAIT

¶1. SUMMARY: New York City-based Chris Byars Jazz Quartet brought the Rhythm Road American Music Abroad Tour to Kuwait April 18-19. With three public concerts -- one impromptu jam session, a musical workshop for students at a local school, and two media interviews, the four American musicians won the hearts and minds of audiences, helping Post to foster cultural links and mutual understanding between Kuwaitis and Americans. END SUMMARY.

¶2. The Chris Byars Quartet had an auspicious start in Kuwait when they took the stage for an impromptu concert with a Cypriot Jazz band as part of the Gulf Jazz Festival on April 17. Scarcely an hour off the plane from Muscat, the American musicians were warmly greeted by the Cypriots -- old friends from previous ECA programs -- and invited up on stage to jam. The crowd responded immediately to the distinctive up-tempo American sound, generating positive buzz for the concerts to come.

¶3. Ambassador Deborah Jones officially kicked off the Chris Byars Quartet's program in Kuwait on April 18 at the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, a cultural institution run by a prominent arts patron and member of the ruling Al Sabah family. The "Dar" supports Islamic and Western arts and culture and values its close relationship with the U.S Embassy and American cultural/academic institutions. The mixed audience of 200 Kuwaitis and foreign expats were in thrall to the band for the full 90-minute program. By playing music by Muslim-American jazz great Gigi Gryce (aka Basheer Qusim), Chris Byars honored the Islamic roots of the venue and exposed the audience to a little known piece of Muslim-Americana.

¶4. Basheer Qusim featured heavily in the second concert, staged for 350 students at the Gulf University of Science and Technology (GUST) on April 19. Chris Byars played maestro to a concert cum education program with information about Basheer Qusim's life and music, along with photos, interspersed between songs. Students rushed the stage at the end of the performance, peppering the band with questions and praise for the music and the jazz style. A number of young people attended both concerts and were heard to exclaim that this was the "best concert ever."

¶5. Prior to the concert on April 19, 40 music students at the Universal American School (a private Kuwaiti school) warmly welcomed the Chris Byars Quartet and showcased their musical talents during a jazz workshop. The band and the students played together and recorded a musical message for students in Brooklyn.

¶6. Kuwaiti media outlets Al-Jarida and Al-Watan covered the Chris Byars Jazz Quartet program in Kuwait. Al-Watan's interview with the band ran in its April 27 edition. A short documentary for Al-Watan TV, featuring interviews with the band and CAO aired on April 20. Al-Jarida ran a positive article on the GUST concert in its April 20 edition.

JONES